

Joliet Junior College
Oral History Program
Le Roy Norberg

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JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
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Interviewers
Frank Arbanas
(signature)

(signature)

(signature)

10/15/75
(date)

Interviewee
LeRoy Norberg
(signature)

Kraker Ave.
(address)

Joliet, Ill.
(city & state)

10/15/75
(date)

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INTERVIEWER: Frank Arbanas

INTERVIEWEE: Le Roy Norberg

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Le Roy Norberg for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Project by Frank Arbanas at Mr. Norberg's home in Joliet, Illinois, on October 15, 1975, at 6:00 p.m.

ARBANAS: Would you like to tell us about your youth -- what you can remember about your youth and background first of all?

Norberg: What do you mean about my youth?

ARBANAS: All the things you can remember, school, if anything.

NORBERG: Well, of course, I attended Marshall School over here.

WIFE: Tell him you were born of Swedish parentage. And you lived in Ridgewood and where you went to school.

NORBERG: Well, that is what I'm telling him. I'm telling the man. Don't you butt in here. This is going on the tape. Get out of here! (Laughter) I went to the Marshall School; and I was going to the Marshall School when it burnt down, you know. Well, then I only went half a day. Then I went over to Ridgewood School. I was over there for about a year and that place burnt down. Then I had to go down to

A faint, sepia-toned background image of a classical building with four columns and a triangular pediment is visible behind the text.

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Central School, you know, to finish my grade school. And then after that, then I went to Joliet Township High School. I went three years to Joliet High School down there. And I suppose you want to hear a little bit about the horse-and-buggy days.

ARBANAS: Yes, that sounds interesting.

NORBERG: Well, they used to have a brewery up here on the west side some place. I think it was Sehring's Brewery, I believe. And the farmers used to come off of Maple Road before it was paved and used to go down and get the hops and stuff, you know, that they used in making this beer. And they would bring it home for their pigs. We used to go out there on the highway and ride out with these farmers, you know, and go out on the farms. And especially around a certain part of the year, you know, they'd plow their fields and stuff, and it was really surprising the amount of arrowheads and stuff, you know, that we found out there. Those was plowed up from the ground. I knew guys there that had maybe two or three boxes of them arrowheads, you know. And hunting was real good around here at that time, too. You know, because a matter of fact, right here where Silver Cross Hospital sits here, I remember there was a fellow who shot a fox, a silver fox down here in the woods. And then I can relate to -- you know, they used to hunt turkeys out here near Pilcher Park. There was good turkey hunting in

them days, too. And I recollect one time there was a fellow by the name of Hartung, I believe his name was. And he had his dog; he was out hunting in Pilcher Park. It was Higgenbotham's Woods at that time, they called it, and he come on five wolves out there. And they started charging him. Well, I suppose they would have just tore him to pieces, and they did kill his dog, you know. They attacked his dog, and he had a shotgun there and he fired three or four shots. He killed a couple of them, and then he beat one to death -- hit him over the head with the stock of the gun you know and killed him. So, like I say, it was real good hunting around here at that time, too. You know, when you think you could even hunt wild turkeys! Well, that was really something. Well, let's see, what else we got in here, Frank. You want to shut it off a minute and we'll think of something else. That was a battleground over there you know. Figured naturally it would have had to have been Indians -- there.

ARBANAS: Over near Silver Cross Hospital?

NORBERG: Yes, over near the Silver Cross Hospital on that big hill. They call it Indian Mound over there. We used to get out when we were kids there and dig. You know you would see a little hump in the ground; we'd dig. Numerous times you'd come up with beads and everything else, you know, made of stone and stuff, you know, that the Indians had made there. And one guy, as a matter of fact, it was two different guys, they actually took up a tomahawk you know in there.

So that must have been an old battleground, you know, right there. What else have we got here, Frank. Shut it off again and we'll see if we can think of something. My first job was a mechanical helper at the bridge and building department on the E.J.&E. Railroad. And I don't know, I think when we started working there, I think we was getting -- I think about 23¢ an hour. That is a far cry from what it is today. But then after, I quit that job, and I went to the agent's office. I was a messenger and a yard clerk. That paid a little bit better there. And then I put four years in the boiler shop. So I am a boilermaker by trade. And after I left that place there, well, then I went to work -- my dad was general foreman of the bridge and building department -- so I went to work there and worked as a mechanical helper for, oh, gosh, I don't know how many years, and then I was promoted to carpenter, and now I am a foreman. So it isn't too bad. At least we get a decent wage right now. Man Alive! What money you got in them days, you know you could take a dollar out then, and you could probably bring home more than you could for \$25.00, as you know, today. So there's been quite a bit of change there in that as far as that is concerned. But that has been the extent of my working career. And I intend to be pensioned off here within the very near future. I don't think I am going to stick around there much longer, you know. I'll just rack it up here and sit and take it easy. (Chuckle)

ARBANAS: They used to steal gravestones?

NORBERG: They wouldn't steal the gravestones but what they would do, you know, they would dump them over and this gravestone is sitting on top of, you know, a lead plate. And they used to dump these things over there you know to just get this lead so they could sell it. So, I thought that was really something, you know, when a person would stoop that low. That's been done. Yes, I know that out there they dumped them all over there. And down, and there's an old German cemetery right down here by the E.J.&E. tracks. They went in there and they dumped about fifteen or twenty of them over too, you know.

ARBANAS: Where about's is that cemetery?

NORBERG: It's right next to the E.J.&E. tracks here going off toward Washington Street, you know. So they got that -- dumped all of them over too. What else have we got?

ARBANAS: You were saying about that lake over on Bluff Street.

NORBERG: Yes, down along there it used to be all rock up in there, you know. And this thing come out, somebody spotted it one day and I guess they called the police up there and one cop come up there and he emptied his gun loaded, and naturally I suppose he must have missed him. After he was all through shooting, why this thing crawled right back in again. It was about a week later he come out and finally you know

somebody spotted him, and they finally got it. I don't know, I suppose, it must have got away from a zoo probably.

ARBANAS: And that was during the horse-and-buggy age yet?

NORBERG: Oh, yes. Sure. And then that horse-and-buggy days, too, you know like you would go to the store today and you can buy your groceries you know, and you can get vegetables, fruit, anything you want in the stores, but in them days, like you take even coffee-- everybody, them old timers, they all had a coffee grinder in the house mounted on the wall. Everybody. And there used to be a guy come around with a horse and wagon, and that's where you would get your tea and coffee and you would get the beans, you know, just the way they came off the vine or whatever it is they grow on, you know. And everybody, you know, used to grind them up in the house and that was good coffee in them days, too. Boy, it is a far cry from what you get today, you know, in that stuff that's already ground up.

WIFE: The ice man?

NORBERG: What?

WIFE: The ice man or coal man?

NORBERG: The coal; you used to get your coal. A fellow would come up, you know, with a team of horses and run that thing up there and run the old chute in the basement, boy, and throw

it in. Today they use conveyers and one thing or another, you know. The handiest thing on earth, I would have to think. By God, they can say want, but they got the work done just the same. Boy! There was nothing but a team of horses pulling them big plows. They'd go out early in the morning and come back dark at night, you know. Plowing the fields and everything else.

WIFE: How about the ice man?

NORBERG: What?

WIFE: The ice man.

NORBERG: The ice man -- Yes, that's another thing there. You had to haul your ice you know -- have an old box in the house, you know, and pack the thing in ice and that is the only way you could keep your stuff from spoiling on you. You got the refrigerator, Frankie, all you got to do is heave that in there and you would have a good place to keep your beer cool and what have you, you know. (Laughter) Yes, we had some good athletes that was turned out from here too, in Joliet you know. We had some guys that went up to the big time. Buckeye, I saw him over at Richards Street playing ball. He went with the Cleveland Indians. Bob Burke, Bob Burke used to pitch ball and he pitched a no-hit game, in the big leagues and I beat him, I beat him when you know I pitched agin him when I was a kid. I beat Bob, I beat him three times in one season, and then he went into the big league

and he pitched a no-hit game, and I beat that guy three different times pitching agin him right here in Joliet. And boy, I really thought that was something you know, something that I never forgot. It is pretty hard to believe , you know, that you're going to beat a guy like that, but I did, I beat him.

ARBANAS: That was when you were a young boy?

NORBERG: Sure, well he was young then, too, you know. But he was pitching for a clothing store. I believe, they called them Best-Evers. And they gave me \$10.00 to pitch agin him for this Meyers' Grocery Store down here. But I pitched agin him three times and I beat him; I beat him every time. And boy, then he went into the big leagues and he threw a no-hitter. Boy that is really something. That is something that I'll never forget. You know, how I could beat a guy like that. It happened. Now what else do we got for the menu there, Frankie?

ARBANAS: Now what was that about the first locomotive?

NORBERG: I fired the first American locomotive. I went overseas and I was firing a locomotive. And I fired the first American locomotive that went into Holland in World War II. And we fired that thing up there and we was under fire too. They were comin' in you know, strafing us, and one thing or another. So I told this guy that was with me. He said, "Well, what are we going to do?" I said,"I know what I am going to do. I am going between the cabin and the boiler." I said,"Let them shoot!" And, by God, they did, you know.

Well, all we had was hospital supplies, you know. All we had was four or five little plywood cars. That was all we had there -- all hospital supplies you, know. And, of course, they wasn't supposed to shoot at anything like that, but they did, you know. They blew a few holes, you know, through them and one thing or another. And then another night when I was flying over there, it was real foggy, and it was early in the morning. Of course, we operated with no lights. You never used no lights over there, and boy, you went rolling over the tracks and you just pray to God that you knew that they were all right, that they weren't mined or something else, you know. But we come ripping over them tracks, and I happened to look out and it just happened that there was a river, a river there, the Seine River, and we were coming and I happened to get a cinder caught up underneath my gogle there, and I just threw my head back, you know, and a guy's giving me a washout back there with a blacked-out flashlight. It just had a little, just a very little streak you know. I could see him, and I told this guy, all he had time to say, and we was double headed, you know, and I said to him I said, "Brakes, George!" and that's all I had a chance to say. And boy, I no sooner said that, you know, and George looked at me and boy he gave her everything she had you know, and boy, and boy, them cars begin to hump and I thought that the tank was going to come right over into the cab, you know, where we were but when we got stopped, I went back and I asked

this guy in there. It was a Frenchman, you know. Of course, we carried the book, you know, so we could be able to talk to them. I wondered what in the world he gave us that washout for -- what it was for. And he took me and he took me down about 20 or 30 feet, and he showed me what it was. They had knocked that bridge out. The thing was just sitting like this, and if we'd kept on a-coming on the dark there, you know, and if I didn't have to look back -- I didn't have to look back at that one particular moment we'd have been down in the Seine River. We would've dropped about 35 feet right off. The bridge was gone. The thing was just knocked completely around, and we got stopped about, oh, I'd say maybe 30 or 40 feet before diving down in there. So there was something I'll never forget. And I'll never forget another night too, you know, like I say -- it was real foggy and everything else. It was during that foggy season over there when we come zooming down. Well, then I had a new engineer. Just a youngster, you know. I don't think he ever run an engine before in his life. And I was firing for him. And I just happened to look around the front end and it was real foggy and I seen a car there. And I said to him, I said "Jesus, brakes!" and that's all I could say to him. And I don't know what happened but boy, we kept right on going. We went right through that. We hit that car and we knocked it four car lengths. Set that thing right inside of another car there, four cars down. Took it right off the wheels

and everything. And hit it so hard that we shoved the thing right in there. Well, there we killed, I think it was four. It was either three or four, military police was sitting in that car, you know, and we killed them. Of course, they were Americans, you know. But then the train exploded and that was that high-test gasoline. That was for Patton over there; that's when he said that if he couldn't get the supplies up there he was going to withdraw his troops. He said "It's wholesale slaughter up here." And he said, "a lots of men" (that supposed-to-be-famous Redball outfit) Well they'd go so far and they was a-scared to go any farther, you know. Get within three or four miles of the line, why they would stop; they would hesitate. But they tried everything, but they couldn't get it to move and then old Patton come out and he said that "if I can't get my men up here and get the supplies for them," he said "I'm going to bring them all out of here." He said, "It's wholesale slaughter up here." He said, "They will kill all of us." So that's when we took over, you know, that we was on fire then. And I told George, I said "I don't know about you but," I said, "come on down on my side," and we went down and there was a bunch of cattails and everything on the side of this hill here. I got over behind a great big tree, and I just stayed there till it broke day. When I got up there, George was laying. He got out and he got down on the opposite side. Well, I figured maybe a gas can or something you know

flew over there and hit him and knocked him down. But he was just burnt. He looked just like the dead branch of a tree laying there. He was a big, tall guy, too, you know. The only way that you could tell, you know, that it was a human being, his intestines, you know, was busted out you know there, but he was just baked. He looked just like the burnt branch of a tree, you know, and I even got a letter from his wife. I don't know how in God's world she found out about me, but she wanted me to write to them. She was running a little grocery store out there in Colorado, and she wanted me to write and tell her exactly what took place, you know, with my husband, you know. Well I tried to write to her but, of course, they censored every bit of mail we put out; and I found out that most everything that I had in there when I tried to explain to her exactly what happened to George, her husband, they had took and they cut all that out. I wasn't allowed to send it, see. So I was just wishing, you know, that some day that maybe I could come out to that woman. I would certainly like to tell her, you know, just what happened. But I am sure that if he would have come down on my side, he'd have been all right. I know he would, because everything went down in the back of us, you know, and it must be God's will. But, boy, you should have seen that there. They had them big copper wires up there that are maybe a quarter of an inch, and that heat was so intense that them wires just sagged right down to the ground. And if we had turned

over the locomotive, well, of course, I was fortunate, we put a couple off the track, you know, but a lot of them kids, you know, were running and they would maybe go down an incline and turn them over. You didn't waste no time with them. Leave them go and send over and get another one. We had them things laying all over in the woods and all over. Whenever they'd run off the tracks or turn over, that was it; you just leave them right there and send in to get another one. And there was another night -- I got a call to come down to the yards, you know, and we had troops and I don't know the account -- I think they had been over in England or something. Supposed to pick up these troops, and we went down there and while the engine was standing still, you know, I was firing for all I was worth with that thing and I'd keep looking up at the gauge and I used to like to travel with about 75 pounds of steam, 75 or 80 you know -- it all depended on if I had a hospital car. You know, they were extra heavy. Then I'd like a little bit more steam. But if I would take off, I'd always manage to have between 70 and 75 pounds of steam up there, you know. And here I was sitting in this yard. You had to go up an incline, you know just like this, straight up. I was sitting down there, and I was firing that thing for all I was worth, and I'd keep looking up at that gauge and nothing's happening. Well, I thought you know, "Geez, this ain't natural!" and you know

I knew a little bit about a boiler and one thing and another, you know, being a boilermaker, you know, and I looked in there and it was just like somebody had two or three garden hoses in there. You know, water flying all over in there. Well, there was about, well, I think there was 35 or 38 stables leaking, and that is dangerous. If they were staggering, it wouldn't be bad, but they were all in a cluster and that water was just flying out of there like crazy. And the arch flues in there was leaking. Everything was leaking. No wonder I couldn't get any steam up! Well I told this guy that I was running, he was a man borrowed down here, this guy here that I had, and I told him I said "I'm not -- I'm not going to take this engine up there," I said, "with all of these kids, these troops on here."

I said, "We can't get no place. I can't even get up the hill with it." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "You can't get no steam up." And, you know, I showed him and I said "Look in the box there. You can see what is going on." Geez, as fast as I throw the fire in there, you know, the water was spraying all over and I couldn't do nothing. Well, anyhow, you know, he called up headquarters down there, and he told him, he said, "This fire boy I got, he don't seem to want to take this engine." And you know they want to know who is he, and he said, "What is this I understand that you, you're not going to take that engine?" "Well," I said "it 'd

be worthless for me to take that engine." I said, "I can't do anything, I can't get any steam up." I said, "If I can't get this thing hot standing still, how in God's world am I going to go up this incline," I said, "and go anyplace with it?" And they said, "You'll take the engine" They says, "You're in the service now and you'll take that engine." I says, "OK, but I'm not going no place with it." I said, "I am going to do wonders if I can get it up this hill." Well, I did. I just fought the thing for everything I had and I got out about three miles, and boy, then I looked up at my -gauge, you know. When I gazed up at that thing there, and boy and I could see the water down, down, down. Well, that just only tells you one thing, it's time to dump any kind of a fire you got and get out of that thing. Because that's when she's ready to explode, you know. Well, like I said, we were way out in the country and I kept looking up at that thing, and, of course, I was sweating up you know a little bit, you know, and my glasses, you know, was kind of steamed up but I put them up on my head and I took a look and I said to this guy, I said, "I'm dumping this fire out, right here." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "Look at my water gauge." I said, "I don't even know", I said, "if I want to stay on here long enough to dump that fire out." Anyhow, I got the big shaker and I turned my brakes over and I dumped that. We just happened to be on a crossing you know where there is a,

you know, a wooden crossing there. Well, man alive! All this red, hot fire and everything you know was rolling down on that, but I couldn't go no place, geez with no water, no steam, no nothing. And well, I turned around and looked for him. Here he is about a half-a-mile down the tracks going down a lonely country road, and he was just kind of looking back. I guess he was expecting any minute, you know, that that thing's going to explode. And I stayed right there with it and I took and I dumped the fire out. Well, after I got my fire out, I wasn't too worried then. I knew, you know that I was going to be all right. But, Oh Brother! Well, he called up. We got into a station, you know, and we called up and he said, "Well," he said, "It happened," he said, "what the fire boy said, that we couldn't go very far with the engine and, he said, "We are out here, and" he said, "he had to dump the fire. We got it right on a wooden crossing out here. But there is nothing we could do." You know, he said "we could do" when it was me that done it! I'm the one that stayed there and dumped it out. I thought I'd stay here if the thing explodes and kills me, I don't care, you know. But, anyhow, they said, "Well, OK, we'll get another engine out there." And by God they did. They tied into this old dead one, and they pulled it off into a side spur there. They put a new one -- Boy, then I got a steamer, boy would that thing go! Man, alive, I'd spray a couple of shovels of coal in that baby and play

with the fire, you know, about 6, 7 inches high. And boy, just beautiful! Boy, and I just look at that old steam gauge and man alive I was ready to pop off any minute, you know. Boy, it's just beautiful, you know, running something like that. That is really something!

ARBANAS: Have you lived here in Ridgewood all your life?

NORBERG: No, no, I was born on Abe Street down here. Well, I think I come up here Frankie, when I was, I couldn't have been over four years old, I don't think. Four or five years old. Then I been here, you know, practically all of my life. Sure, and boy how fast those years come on you. Gee, I can clearly recollect when I was your age, you know, just like it was, just say like yesterday. I 'member, you know, when the first pair of long pants I had on. And I can tell you right where I was the first day that I wore them pants. My mother, you know, rigged them up, you know; my dad was a big man. He weighed about two hundred and eighty some pounds, you know. Well, I think she just must of took the legs of one, you know, just one leg of his pants and made a pair of pants for me. And I come right through here. That used to be -- you could pick hazelnuts, as you wanted. Right over here, you know; right in that whole block, that square block right here. I used to cut through there you know. I was going to school you know. Christ, we picked up -- I haven't seen a hazelnut bush or anything else like that around here for years. This woods over here used to be full of walnut trees and everything

else. They have all disappeared. Well, I suppose, you know, as expensive as that wood is, I think you know people, you know when you read -- come out there and cut them trees down and drag them away. This thing here -- this thing here -- was made out of walnut. I got a stump from Harold Johnson that lived up the street here; we took it over to the "J", My dad, you know, was still over there as he was general foreman over there then, and we had our regular shop over there, you know. We had the big bench saws and everything else. We took this stump over there and cut it in about inch strips and took it up in the attic and dried it -- dried that lumber for about five or six years. Then he went to work with it, you know, and that's the aftermath of it there. (clock) That's the last clock that he made. And I was offered a real good piece of change, boy, when they come down from Chicago. Here a fellow come down and saw me one day and I told him, "You couldn't buy that clock." I says, "I don't care," I says "how much money you offered me." "Well," he said, "what kind of a figure would interest you," and I says, "No figures." I said, "I wouldn't take it." If I wanted to get into that thing there, but the old gent's -- some of his old blood stains are still on there, you know, where he had cut himself -- you know with his jigsaws and one thing or another when he was working with it. "No," I said, "that isn't for sale." I don't know what in the God's world or who told him about it but he came up here and he saw me one day. That's the last

one that he made. And oh he made so many of them. And he made 23 violins, too. I don't know where they disappeared to. You know the violins. But one of the violins that my sister played in the symphony orchestra and she was an instructor too. And she turned down an all-girl band in Chicago -- a stage contract. Well, at that time, of course, that was years back, too, you know, but they offered her -- she was to get \$85.00 a week and all of her costumes and everything, you know. And she was going to go but then she was going with an attorney, you know, and he was a little bit too smart for her. He talked her out of it. She was supposed to leave that following morning and that was the end of that, you know. My mother went to wake her up in the morning, why you couldn't pull her out of that house with a team of horses. "No", she said, "John said no, I better stay home. I better stay home." So she turned that thing down. But them violins, you know like I say, the ones she played in the symphony orchestra, my dad made that one, too. He learned that up here. He used to get his hair cut up on Collins Street. There was an old Polish barber up there by the name of Remis, and he used to cut the old gent's hair. Well then he used to repair and make violins on the side you know up there, see. And the old gent, you know, he would get his hair cut there a few times, you know, and he seen what he was doing, and pretty soon he brought him a violin. Well that's when he wanted him to -- he said, "Why don't you quit the railroad, come on with me?" He said,

"We'll both go in business here." He said, "We can make a lot of money." but the old gent said no. He just clowned around with it -- in his spare time at home, you know, and I think he made about, oh, I think he must've made about six or seven of these clocks, and I think each one of the kids got one, but I think I am the only guy that has got one now... All the rest of them, whatever happened to them, I don't know -- they just seemed to disappear, you know, some place. But, you know, for a guy as big and everything as he was, you know, it takes some doings, you know, for all of this here stuff, you know, to ...

WIFE: Tell him about the violins he made.

NORBERG: I told him about those violins. He made 23 of them. You know there is one thing I would say about him. If you sat there and he got an outline of you, you know, he would draw you, and I bet you if you give him a block of wood, he would just cut you just into the size and everything you are and carve you out. I bet you there would be nobody that knew you that you know that wouldn't recognize that. You -- carved out of a block of wood. I bet you, you would say, "That's Frank Arbanas there. It's got to be." Well, look at there now. There. Who do you suppose that is on the front there? Doesn't that look like Lincoln?

ARBANAS: Abraham Lincoln.

NORBERG: Abraham Lincoln. Now he just took a picture from there and look at how close he carved that thing there, see... Here's an old man and an old lady sitting on that -- the only thing there, now if I was to do that, I would either've made them so much smaller, you know, like that little bench that they're sitting on is too small, you know, for how big they are, see.

ARBANAS: Do you recall any early transportation, like if you were to go to Chicago or some place, would you have to take a streetcar or train, or...?

NORBERG: I never -- now, wait a minute.

WIFE: On Collins Street, the streetcars.

NORBERG: No, we are talking about if you went to Chicago. I used to go up there with my dad to ball games, on the streetcars.

ARBANAS: Did the streetcars run all the way into Chicago?

WIFE: Yes.

NORBERG: I don't remember for sure. I used to go up there with him. He was a big ball fan, you know. Oh, man alive! He was crazy for ball. And like I say, you know, I know we used to go up to see the Cubs. I saw Babe Ruth different times, you know, as great as he was. And they, they holler, you know, they say about this here Henry Aaron, you know, how great he was. And one thing about how many home runs that you wouldn't be able to count them, I don't believe. When he was hitting that ball, that thing was full of sawdust. It was full of sawdust! But this thing here, it's just like a -- they him 'em today -- I saw Nellie Fox up there in Chicago one day -- he was falling out of the way. They threw one, you know, and it curved into him and he was falling away from it, falling back, and it hit his bat, went down over the first baseman's head over there and he got a double out of it. He was falling away, you know, preventing from getting

hit. And just imagine, you know, they speak about this guy here and how great that Babe Ruth was. But I will never forget that day when I went up there and saw him.. My dad was with me. I can't think of who else. We had another old-timer with us. But he come up there, just in batting practice, warming up you know, and he was a great big, big, you know, guy but he had skinny little legs on him, and boy he had a big neck. And he was no wider through the shoulders than that, and a big pouch on him, too, you know. But, oh! could he hit a ball. Man, he just stood up there and he pointed out into the seats, you know, just for warm up. Boy he'd stroke that ball and he -- zoom -- up she'd go, -you know, and land right up there in them seats, you know. Sit there and then he would turn around and give the people a little bow, you know, and then he'd pull his hands up like so, you know, meaning another one's going right up and it ain't going any farther away than that, you know, from the one.... And I seen him put three of them and I betcha they wasn't a foot and a half or two feet apart. Right there in that one area. Right up in the seats he put them. Well, then he took his cap off and he waved it and he made it known that this one's going completely out of the park. And he laid down the prettiest little drag bunt that you ever wanted to see. Boy, that thing just trickled, you know, right down the third base line. Boy, oh boy, you ought to see the hand that they give that guy.

Oh, how great he was! There is no comparison of him and any batter. I don't care who they are, there is no one. No one could compare with that fellow. He was something else. Then they talk of this Henry Aaron. Henry Aaron had an opportunity -- he played in I don't know how many more games than him and everything, you know, and there, you know, he beat that record but man alive if he was hitting that ball today as light as that thing is ---- Ho-Ho - Why he even put one -- with the dead ball that they were using in them days, he put one out of the park up in Chicago, up in Sox Park. He put it up over the top of the stands. So it will give you a little idea of how he could hit a ball. He was something else.

ARBANAS: Do you recall anything about prohibition? Any bootleggers?

NORBERG: Well, I guess that was all taken care of by this here Capone up in Chicago, wasn't it? He pretty well had a monopoly on all the booze and everything else, I think, you know. Well, I know one thing, you know, that that beer that they were making in them days, they used hops and some kind of mash or something you know. Well, that is where the farmer used to come down in a big heavy wagon and a team of horses, you know, and it was well, maybe three or four times a week. They'd go up there and they'd give them this here stuff. I suppose they -- I'll never forget how them farmers used to

come down in a big heavy wagon and a team of horses, you know, and it was well, maybe three or four times a week. They'd go up there and they'd give them this here stuff. Well, it had already been used, and they would take it home for the pigs. And boy, they just got fat on that, and boy they loved that stuff. I suppose they -- I'll never forget how them farmers used to come up and down that Maple Road. There was no paving or nothing out there. Boy the dust would be about three or four inches thick on that windy road. They used to have a guy out here that raised pigeons. And they used it for the squabs. He used to take them to both the Silver Cross and the St. Joseph's Hospitals. And, oh, he had thousands and thousands and thousands of pigeons out there. A couple of times a week, you know, he'd go out and he'd get, you know, he never sold the old ones, you know too dangerous -- you'd get disease and everything. But them squabs, you know, just about the time they'd get their pin feathers on, you know, then he'd take them in a basket and bring them up here to both of the hospitals. He used to do that. He was quite a violinist too, that fellow. He lived out there in that big stucco place out there on Maple Road. But I do recollect, boy though, that the huntin' was real, real good, you know, all around, all around here, in them days. You could go out and get rabbits any place, you know. Boy, everything, it seems like it's thinned out, you know, plenty now; but boy it used to be

real good. I know I enjoyed myself, you know, going out like that. And I don't know what else we can talk about, Frankie. You want to play it back.... like if you were going to burn off these staples, and knock them down. Where as today, you know they'd use the air hammer, you know, to flatten her and burn them off first and then knock them down. You should see the job that the guys would do, you know, when I was a kid working down there, you know, with maybe a fifteen pound maul, and boy they would -- the work was just perfect, simply perfect. As a matter of fact, I think they made a much better looking job, you know, with, by hand, with just the maul than you could with the air hammer. Oh, I worked with some good men down there, boy.

ARBANAS: You say guys got killed in them early days with that coupling.

NORBERG: Oh, yes, I recollect when this here guy, his, I can't think what his name was, now, he lived in Ridgewood here. And there was a cut of cars was standing there, you know, and well, of course, today, you know, anybody's smart enough to know, you know, that maybe they're going to throw a car down on the other side and hit that thing, you know, and run them.... and there was a string of cars this way and there was an opening, maybe about three or four feet. He was going to go through there you know; he was in a hurry, you know, and he couldn't wait.

And boy, just as he was going through there, why they happened to hit these cars up there, and they come together and that coupler went right through him -- that big coupler, you know how big that is. It went right through and it joined together in there, and there he was. He was bellowing and hollering, you know. People tell me you could hear him half way up to Ridgewood, you know, hollering. But, you know by God, that that guy lived, and they got a priest over there and one thing and another, give him the last rites and everything, and he told him, he said, "Now", he said "You can pull him apart." He told him, you know, he knew that as soon as they pulled them apart, that he was gone. So you know he'd told them to get a priest and everything, and while that coupler was through him, he was there and he was conscious and everything. This priest came down and gave him last rites and one thing and another, He says, "Now I'm ready." He says, "Pull them apart." As soon as they pulled them apart, boy, down he went. Oh, there was a lot of guys that got killed over there. Well, as a matter of fact, I had a brother that got killed over there, you know. He fell off a smokestack. My brother, Jay. Oh, sure. My dad was standing right down below. He saw him when he fell. The heat got him, you know. He was down, just got a nice cool drink of water, and he had a bandana. He got water on that, and he put it on his head and he started up and the old gent told him, he says, "It is almost noon time." He says "It's time for lunch." "Oh" he says, "I'm goin up", he says

"and shut off the air." He says, "Oh, forget it." He says, "Go on up there after dinner." "No," he says, "I'm going up now." He just got to the top of that thing, and the little guy up there with him, he went to hand him a tackle or something like that, and well, he was standing on his tip toes and boy, over he went. Boy, he just went two and a half times before he went right down and landed on top of that concrete roof there. He hit the corner of that roof. So the old gent, he told these fellows, he said, "Run up and get the kid," he says, "I seen him fall." He said, "Go up there and take him down." So they got him down off the roof, but And he was strong enough. Well, that happened about, it must have been about a quarter to twelve that day, and, my God, he lived until about twenty minutes after two in the afternoon. And boy, the whole back of his head was just about gone, you know. Just about sheered off, you know, when he fell.

ARBANAS: Can you remember the first time you ever drove in a car other than a horse and buggy? Or the first car your parents ever owned?

NORBERG: Oh, yes. But long before they ever had a car, I rode with a guy, that would be an old home model "T" Ford, you know, with the clutch reverse and brake, you know. (Laughter) You'd have to go half way in on the clutch, and then to back up and this and that, and then you had your gas and spark up on the steering wheel, and two prongs, you know, that stuck up there. But I remember the first vehicle that

I saw. It was right down there across from the hospital there, and there was a guy who used to -- he used to go around and he would pick up garbage and stuff, you know, for I suppose he must have had some pigs or something, you know, and he had an old, well, I don't know if you would call it a truck or what it was, he had just, he had made an old box for around the back end of it, and it seemed that the only thing that was holding the feathers on there was a big belt. It went from the top and up to the top of the roof you know and it didn't take us long to get hip. Boy he'd get out and you had to crank it. He would crank until the sweat was running off of him, you know, and all we had to do, if we wanted that thing to stop, just put your foot lightly up on the fender. Just touch it. Just put your foot up on the fender and that thing 'd die. Then he'd get out and he'd just crank for all he was worth. That is the first kind, I don't know what in the world kind of a car or what you would call that thing. But it was really something. That is the first one that I ever seen you know. Anything with wheels under it. But it was the first ride that I ever had and I believe that guy was from Wilton Center. And he give me a ride in a Ford one time, and, oh brother! I just couldn't get over it. Geez, them things would ride just like a wagon too, you know. When you hit them bumps and no springs, no nothing there, you know. Boy! Oh, boy! I .. yeah, that's how we used to get to Chicago too,

now, that you know it dawns on me -- With the old streetcars you know.

ARBANAS: Was transportation good, I mean, did they have good streetcars?

NORBERG: Yes, I thought they were all right, you know. Of course, they used to have trouble coming up the hill here, you know, from off of Cass Street. And then they'd come up Hebbard Street, and that's, you know, quite a grade in there. And then the guys used to clown around there and they'd put grapes on the tracks and everything, boy, and you would just spin the wheels, and you wouldn't go nowhere, or else somebody would run out there and all you would have to do -- you had that trolley wire. That's where they got their power, you know. A lot of guys would run up in the back there when you were spinning the wheels and grab the trolley and just pull it down and just let the thing go, you know, and the thing would fly up and the lights would go out and everything. And there was one motorman here on this Cass Street line here that got killed. You know where the cemetery is that's right down below here. What is that, Mt. Olivet, ain't it? Right below the hill here. Well, boy, something happened and he was all alone in the car, you know, and he was coming back. He used to go as far as Bronco's Store down there. Then they had a "Y" in there, and then they turned the thing around and come back. Well, he was going down the hill there and something happened. Well, he just didn't make it. He went right over across Cass Street, and that thing went right over in the --

there is a house right close near the fence there and he run right in to that. Oh, yes, he got killed there. I remember that.

ARBANAS: Did it take you a long time to get to Chicago when you were going up to the games?

NORBERG: Oh, yes, I suppose it would have to be about an hour -- an hour and a half -- an hour and forty-five minutes -- maybe two hours. Well, geez, they used to stop at every crossing you know. They would just stop and the motorman or conductor would get out there and look to see if there was anybody coming. Maybe someone would be coming for a couple of blocks and they'd see them. They'd sit there and wait, you know. Oh, yes, you'd

WIFE: It took more than an hour.

NORBERG: I said maybe a couple of hours. Oh, sure. But I don't know, it was a lot of fun riding them things. I got a kick out of it, you know. You didn't have them good, soft seats in there. There was nothing but a wooden seat that you sat on. But I enjoyed it. I had a lot of fun. Yes. I don't know. It looks like they are going to do away with the trains now, though, too, don't it? You know they're getting more and more scarce. I don't know. What was that Higgenbotham that lived out there. You know, all the people used to say, that before, that was a mansion out there. We used to go through there, you know, every now and then, you know, after they had

moved away from there. But I don't know how many rooms they was in that place. There was tunnels going in there and everything else, and it was right next to a flower house in a cemetery out there, you know. There was a place there, too, you know that they used to dump them gravestones over and go for that land out there. I don't know how many stones there was there, but they went out there and found every one of them tipped upside down, too. But that old haunted house, I wonder, is that place still out there, Rose?

WIFE: No.

NORBERG: Did they tear it down?

WIFE: That was brought from the World's Fair in New York in 1870.

NORBERG: Higginbotham's home?

WIFE: Not the original house, the place that they call the haunted house.

NORBERG: Oh, Man! I don't know how they'd ever get a big thing like that -- haul a big thing like that down there.

ARBANAS: Was Higgenbotham a real rich gentleman?

NORBERG: Yes.

ARBANAS: What did he do?

NORBERG: I don't know exactly what he did, but, oh, he was

WIFE: He owned all of Highland Park.

NORBERG: He was a real wealthy guy, I guess. He has a big frog pond out there, too. We used to go out there and get frogs, you know. Boy, that place used to be loaded with them out there, you know. Right alongside of his place there, you know, he just had a big lake there, you know, and just filled in with logs, and weeds, and stuff, and boy, them frogs was just loaded out there. You could go out and get 20 or 30 of them any time, out there, you know. We used to shoot them with a slingshot. He'd come out there, sittin' on a pad, you know, and we'd knock them off. Yes, I don't know, we used to wander through there, but a guy got shot out there; I think they put a watchman out there or something and.....

WIFE: How about that old house out there on Route 30 where President Lincoln once stopped?

NORBERG: Oh, yeah. Well, that's up on the other side of Frankfort, ain't it?

WIFE: No, it's not there. It's someplace.....

NORBERG: No, it ain't. It's right out on the other side of Frankfort, on the Lincoln Highway. I know where it's at. It's an old white house. Yeah, the president stayed there --

Lincoln. Lincoln stayed there overnight. One night. Out here on the Lincoln Highway. That place is still there. It's still there. Yes.

WIFE: How about the Gougar house on Lincoln Highway? It used to be a post office.

NORBERG: Was that a post office? Gougar's house out there? Is that still there, or did they tear that down?

WIFE: No. It's remodeled; it's still there.

NORBERG: Oh, it's still there. It used to be a post office. Gougar's place out there, you know. Talking about prisoner escapes there used to be some people lived over on the other side of Maple Road there. I believe their name was Echol. I believe their name was Echols or Eichols. And this woman she got off the streetcar on the corner of Hebbard and Eagle Street there, and then you know she walked up through the woods. Well, them days up there, you know a way back, they had to wear a regular uniform, and it was, I don't know, gray -- gray and white stripes -- or something, you know, the pants, and the jersey, too, you know.

ARBANAS: Yes, the prisoners.

NORBERG: Well, she was -- she jumped off the streetcar up there, and she had to go through the woods there, and this guy was laying there along the -- right along the path -- he was laying there. And, well, she started to scream and she

got all excited, you know; and he, well, he was a gentleman about it. He told her, he said, "Just take it easy, Missus," he said, "I'm not out here to hurt you or anybody", he said. He said, "I'd just like to have a little bit of freedom." He said, "Forget about me." He said, "I'm not going to hurt you." So I guess when she got home, she called and it wasn't long and they come up and they heard him, and they surrounded that place and they got him and took him back. Oh, sure, they used to break out all the time. Sure, they killed the warden up there, too, at the penitentiary up there. I think it was about four or five of them, you know, was tangled up in that. Well, they took them down here then, and well, they hung several of them. And I guess there was one that, they could of got him, but he got back to Mexico; he was a Mexican. He got back to Mexico.

WIFE: Tell him when they hung them.....

NORBERG: Well, they hung them right down here at the old jail. Where was it? That was Chicago Street where that jail was, wasn't it? Right by the Rock Island tracks.

ARBANAS: Did they hang them outside?

NORBERG: Oh, sure. They had a scaffold there, and you went up them thirteen steps and I know that this here -- we used

to go down there, you know. We'd get up on the Rock Island tracks and they had this here -- they had a couple of guys. They was locked up up there, and one of them was an old bald-headed guy down below, and he was cutting the grass, and this guy knew that they were going to hang him the next day, and boy he had a beautiful head of hair on him. His name was Raul; I think he was a Mexican. Well, he was up at out house, he was a great singer, and he was a trustee, you know: but he got tangled up with this gang, and, of course, they had to do away with him. But, oh, he had a beautiful voice: he could sing. I recollect he come right up to my sister. They used to go up to entertain the convicts, you know. One played the violin, one played the piano, and my other sister, she sang. And this guy here, my sister was going to accompany him on the piano, this here Raul. Boy, I remember it just like it was yesterday. He had a pair of patent leather oxfords on, he had a blue necktie, had a blue serge suit, and boy, what a head of hair he had! But he got tangled up with this crew and you know, they were going to do away with him. And he looked down and he saw this baldheaded guy down there cutting the grass, and he says, "That's all right down there, Doc," he says, "you can have this beautiful head of hair of mine after tomorrow." And by God, you know they did away with him. They hung him the next day. And there was one that they had locked up down there, but he got away. And, oh gosh, I don't

think it's been more than twenty years ago, I guess, they finally caught up with him. They got him up in Chicago, and by God they put the scaffold back up and they took him down here and they hung him, too. But then, like I said, there was one of them maybe his name was Torres, or Stoloski. Well, they done away with this Stoloski, too, but there was one of them got away and he got down there by Mexico and they knew he was there, but he had -- he had TB or something, and they knew that he was there, but they couldn't go down and get him. You know the government didn't want to pay anything to get him, go through all that expense to bring him back and just do away with him, so they said, "He won't live long anyhow." They said, "Let him down there." So they did. Oh, yeah, there was about six or seven of them got tangled up in that up there. That blood is still on the concrete bar up there where they killed that warden, Kline. Boy, they just broke out of there and wherever they got them, they had knives, and every thing else. Boy, and they just stuck him; they just cut him to ribbons, you know. Oh, yes, but sure they used to break out up there all the time. You know, I suppose they were trustees, you know. And they'd just pick up and walk away. They used to blow a whistle. They had a siren or something that'd go off. You know, everytime, no matter where you were, when you'd hear that thing, then you knew, you know, that there was some convicts that broke loose. Well, I guess they only

got one more left now of them five, wasn't it, (from the Marion maximum security prison break recently). Broke out in Marion, IL or something like that. I guess there's only one left. He's the most vicious one of the crew, I guess.

ARBANAS: Were there any killings around here during that time?

NORBERG: With these guys here?

ARBANAS: Yes.

NORBERG: No. But I believe if anybody, you know, would've got near them -- One day, you know, they broke out of the jail down here, when they had them here. And one of them -- there was a -- I don't know if it was a deputy sheriff or who it was, he shot him. He was running down the Rock Island tracks there, and he shot him. That's guy's name was Rissle. I can remember that just like it was yesterday. Yeah, they shot him. Shot him right through the heart. You know he was running on the tracks up there. But they took and they hung the rest of them, but like I said, there was only one that got away, and he got back down into Mexico down there. And they didn't want to pay the money to bring him back. They said, "As long as he's failing in health, and he won't live long anyhow," they said, "what's the sense of dragging him back here and putting up the scaffold and then go through all that trouble?" So they let him down there. Well, I imagine he must be dead and gone by now. He would have to be. Yes, I

don't know much more Frankie, that you would be interested in. Can we play that back now and see what it sounds like?

ARBANAS: Thank you Mr. Norberg for this interview, it has been both helpful and interesting.

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